

A Natural History of Australian Bats – Working the Night Shift

by Greg Richards and Les Hall with photography by Steve Parish

Publisher: CSIRO Publishing, Collingwood, 2012. viii, 192 pages, hardback, colour photographs. ISBN 9780643103740. RRP \$79.95

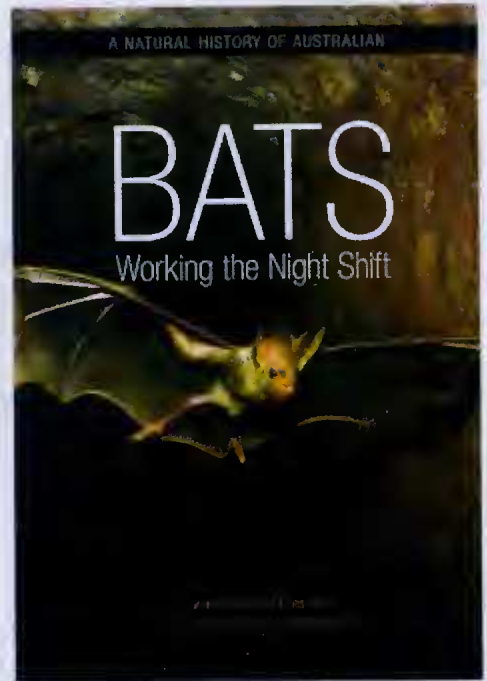
A Natural History of Australian Bats – Working the Night Shift by Greg Richards and Les Hall is an absolutely tremendous book, which introduces the wonderful world of bats. The authors, who have worked for over 40 years on bats (as you can tell), present a broad range of topics on Australian bats in a captivating and descriptive way.

With over 400 large beautiful colour photographs, mostly by the acclaimed photographer Steve Parish, it is written for the general public, naturalists and students. But I am sure that scientists will also find it enjoyable, and learn a few things, as I certainly did.

The page size is large – A4 – and so is the text, which is succinct and clear. The text of the book is 184 pages long, and condenses major topics on our current knowledge about Australian bats into eight punchy chapters.

The first chapter opens by cultivating a general fascination about bats, and you can easily see the passion of the authors for these nocturnal mammals. A short overview of significant events in bat research history follows, including the development of specialised research equipment.

The next chapter, the Travelogue, presents some of the characteristic species, as well as important bat habitats and noteworthy locations for bats from each 'bat bioregion', from significant islands, down to the major cities in Australia. This part might be especially enjoyable for grey nomads (bat veteran researchers or enthusiasts). More specific details are then presented in chapters 3 to 5 on the sophisticated and intriguing bat morphology, bat breeding behaviour and general ecology. These chapters constitute nearly one third of the book and provide a great overview as well as interesting facts on major topics in these areas.



A disturbing part of the book is chapter 6, where trials and tribulations of being a bat in Australia are described. Short and diverse paragraphs cover a range of issues, from the natural predators of bats to the serious impact of humans and the potential future impacts of global warming, clearly showing the risks and threats bats are exposed to. Chapter 7, which refers to the book title, starts by describing the fossil history of bats. It then gives an overview on bats in the culture of Aboriginal Australians, in prehistoric paintings in Australian caves, and goes on to detail the

first encounter of European explorers with bats in Australia. Also highlighted are the passionate people who rescue and care for injured bats. The closing chapter is devoted to species profiles, with stunning photos of a large proportion of Australian bats, and associated descriptive information.

What I liked especially about this book is that it brings together current knowledge on bats in Australia, and each chapter is presented in a way that can be followed easily even by people who are completely new to the world of bats. In addition, it manages to present factual information that would intrigue bat scientists, making this an enjoyable read for them too. All readers

benefit greatly by the profusion of photographs that enhance the text to make this book a very engaging read. I guarantee that, by the end of this book, readers will be hooked on bats, if they are not hooked already!

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A Guide to Australia's Spiny Freshwater Crayfish.

By Robert B McCormack

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From time to time I have been asked to identify freshwater crayfish for environmental managers, curious members of the public or kids. While I know something about marine crustaceans, these groups are not my speciality. So a 'guide' is just what I need. This new book is a fine publication but it is not a guide for those who might want to find out the name of a newly caught crayfish. Identification of species, especially in a genus like *Euastacus* with 50 named species and more yet to be described, is no easy task. To the uninitiated (that's most of us) telling one from the other is difficult. Gary Morgan, whose taxonomic work (1986–1997) is the foundation of current understanding, provided dichotomous keys full of arcane terms and demanded an appreciation of subtle distinctions. No substitute for these keys is provided in this book—perhaps that is not possible but some of the new information provided here, colour patterns for example, might have proved useful. I wonder how the author and his colleagues identify species without resorting to Morgan's

